

The Message of the Rosary



by Father Aloysius Biskupek, S.V.D.

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The Reason Why

Many Catholics, especially intelligent and well-meaning friends of the liturgical revival, seem puzzled by the fact that in the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima the rosary played such a prominent part. Is not the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass more important? Holy Mass is the unbloody re-enactment of the Sacrifice of our salvation, the centre of divine worship, the source of grace from which we hope for a renewal of the world in Christ. Why was not more



frequent attendance at Holy Mass urged by our blessed Mother? Yet, it is certain that any request or recommendation coming from our blessed Mother cannot but be the best. Mary, as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, the Mother of the Saviour and the Mediatrix of all Graces, has no more ardent desire than to lead us to a fuller appreciation of the mysteries of our redemption, to a more abundant participation in their life-giving grace. If she attaches so much importance to the rosary, the reason can only be that the rosary is the most practical means to bring about these happy results. The rosary will lead us to the altar of sacrifice, to Holy Mass and Holy Communion, to a more intimate union with Jesus and a profounder grasp of the spirit of the Church.

Asking for the recitation of the rosary, Our Lady of Fatima asks for an intelligent, understanding recitation, and that calls for reflection on the prayers that compose it, the Sign of the Cross, the Creed, the Our Father and Hail Mary, the Glory be, prayers which are, so to say, a compendium of the

doctrines of our holy Faith. Their frequent, thoughtful repetition cannot but fix them more deeply in our minds and help applying them to our lives.

To these prayers are added the mysteries which recall the principal events in the life of Jesus and Mary; they are so to say beautiful lamps, white and crimson and gold, illuminating our road to heaven. Meditation on these mysteries is necessary for the proper recitation of the rosary. Our Lady of Fatima requests it particularly for the observance of the five first Saturdays. It is evidently her wish that we become familiar with the contents of these mysteries; learn their beautiful lesson for our own lives and their practical significance for the world at large.

To secure a speedier and more general fulfillment of this wish of our blessed Mother the following reflections have been written. They may be used as instructions or readings, especially on the occasion of the five first Saturday.

In our days, when an appalling ignorance of religion is widespread even among Catholics, when the spirit of the world surges up and down all the avenues of life, when there is so little understanding of the interior life, such general flight from the cross, such tragic forgetfulness of spiritual ideals and values, the rosary, with its mysteries, acts as an ever-present teacher of religion, as an inspiration and driving power for a life of living faith.

The rosary, far from interfering with the liturgical worship of the Church becomes its best support, inasmuch as it makes us lovers of Christ, and lovers of Christ will be drawn to the altar of His Eucharistic presence, sacrifice and Communion. As always, so it is true in this case: Through Mary to Jesus.

The Message of the Joyful Mysteries



Introduction

These mysteries introduce us into the wise and loving designs of God, according to which the Saviour of men was to enter this world and to be prepared for His tremendous sacrifice of our salvation during the years of His infancy and hidden life. They hold up before us the ideal of the interior life, the life of prayer and holy desire, of intimate communication with God in our hearts and with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, of complete surrender to the dispensations of Divine Providence, of loving faithfulness in humble and lowly duties, of silent endurance in the many unseen trials of the soul that strives after perfection.

Whatever may be the external circumstances of a man's life, even though it may be most active, a life of leadership and grand achievement, the spirit of the joyful mysteries is indispensable for it, if it is to be a holy life leading to God, our last end. Intimate contact with God is the hidden power plant that makes external activity fruitful for eternity.

The Annunciation

A lovely scene opens the earthly history of the God-man. The grandest manifestation of God's power is about to take place and Gabriel, the Power of God, is its herald. The Archangel Gabriel is sent to a virgin in the little town of Nazareth; her name is Mary and she is espoused to a man by the name of Joseph.



The Message

The prince of heaven bows in reverence before the humble maiden as he greets her, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women." To be blessed among women meant but one thing for a Jewish maiden, and that was to be the mother of the Messiah. Precisely this is the burden of the Angel's message: Mary is the chosen one among all women to give to the world the promised Saviour. The very thought of it grips her with holy fear. But where God calls, there is nothing to fear. Gabriel assures Mary, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace with God. And behold, you shall conceive in your womb and shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus." Yet Mary had taken the vow of virginity; how then shall this be done if God was pleased with her vow? Nothing is impossible with the Almighty God. He, who created the first man without the help of father and mother, surely will know how to give the Saviour of the world a human nature without the co-operation of a human father. The Archangel continues, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Most

High shall overshadow you. And therefore the Holy One to be born shall be called the Son of God."

The Answer

All is now clear to this blessed Virgin and her answer is a full and absolute surrender to the will of God, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Your word." In that very moment, there was wrought in Mary the tremendous miracle of the Incarnation. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (Luke 1:26-38). In this mystery of the Incarnation and the consequent divine motherhood of the Blessed Virgin lies the source of Mary's all-surpassing greatness. Whatever grace had been bestowed upon her before was to prepare her for it, and whatever grace and gift was added in succeeding years is the effect and fruit of what was begun at the Annunciation.

Spiritual Vessel

Mary is now a spiritual vessel, a vessel of the Holy Spirit, fashioned by Him, the Finger of God, with the skill of the Divine Artist and endowed by Him with all the jewellery of heaven. The Holy Spirit has deposited in her the treasure of the Most Blessed Trinity. He has overshadowed her and beneath His shadow, the Son of the Eternal Father has taken up His abode within her. And so the Holy Spirit continues to overshadow her with His divine power and love, to protect and to guide her to ever greater heights of spirituality and holiness. According to Saint Paul vessels are made by the potter for honourable and for common uses. The Immaculate Spouse of the Holy Spirit is the vessel made for the most exalted and glorious use that could be assigned to a human being. She is a vessel more precious than the chalice used at Holy Mass, although it is the same precious blood and body that rests in both; the chalice is made of lifeless material

and contributes nothing to the substance of the blood of Christ which it contains, whereas Mary has given of her own substance to the substance of the body and blood of the Saviour. He is bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood. She is a living chalice consecrated by the Holy Spirit Himself.

Growing in Holiness

Conscious of the great things which God has wrought in her, Mary cannot but be absorbed in never-ceasing, loving reflection on the love of God. Her thoughts and desires rise to the Father in heaven Who has granted her the privilege of calling Him Son, whom the Father has begotten from all eternity; all her love is given to the Eternal Son Who deigned to become her Child, and spiritual canticles well up in her heart to sing out her gratitude to the Holy Spirit who wrought these wonderful things in her. She is the singular vessel of devotion, the like of which is found neither in heaven nor on earth. In the shrine of her virginal womb, the Eternal Son made the first act of His complete surrender to the will of the Father, that made Him obedient unto death and led Him to die on the cross as the victim of sin. Mary adds her surrender to that of her Divine Son, ever repeating, through the attitude of her will, the words she had spoken on the day of the Annunciation, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Your word." And so there rises to the throne of God from the living sanctuary of Mary's heart the incense of prayer and holy desires, undisturbed by the external conditions of her life.

God Dwelling in Us

In a true though limited sense we share in the greatness of our heavenly Mother. The same Holy Spirit that overshadowed her came down upon us in baptism and wrought

wonderful things in our souls. With the Holy Spirit came the Father and the Son and took up their abode in us, and we were made spiritual vessels. The same Word of God that was made flesh in her is received by us in Holy Communion in the identical human nature which He received from His Virgin Mother. And when His sacramental presence ceases, He still remains in us through a wonderful communication of life and grace. We are Christ-bearers, temples of God. In this blessed fact lies the Christian's honour, the ever-present inspiration for a life of prayer and recollection.

Holy Life

God has given Himself to us. After the example of Mary, the full and unconditional surrender of ourselves to God must be the answer. Is it not natural that we should be ever mindful of that most precious possession of ours, the greatest distinction which has come to us, namely, that we possess and carry within ourselves the God in whose vision the angels and saints delight? Is it not reasonable that the same God should occupy all our attention? And where mind and will are absorbed in God, there our desire shall be that God's Will be done in us and through us. By doing the will of God, we advance in God's love, and that is holiness. The will of God is our exaltation, our strength, consolation, and peace.

The example of our blessed Mother in this mystery leads us to the practice of the interior life. The habitual concentration of our thoughts on God and the wonderful things He has wrought in us will not unfit us for active work, but rather assist us to do it more perfectly because of the ever-present God. The practice of the interior life will make Christians different from men of the world with their thoughts and desires all centred on earthly things; the interior life gives constant evidence of faith in an unseen world, in spiritual ideals. Who will deny that this type of example is a crying

need to counteract the materialism of our times? Our Lady of Fatima wishes to make us lovers of the interior life through the rosary.

The Visitation

Since the day of the Annunciation, Mary was a living tabernacle. The Saviour of the world surveyed His work from the hiddenness of His abode. Even now, He longed to be active, to save and sanctify souls, but for the present, He could do it only through the co-operation of His holy Mother. But His love also burns in Mary's heart and soon it sends forth its first rays into the world. The Archangel had mentioned to Mary the condition of her kinswoman, Elizabeth; this now furnishes the occasion.



Visiting Elizabeth

For the first time in the history of the chosen people the true Ark of the Covenant, harbouring within her bosom David's greatest Son and promised Messiah, moves on the highways of Palestine from Nazareth to the hill country of Judah on her way to Elizabeth. She enters the house with a greeting of peace; what else could it be, since she bore within herself the Prince of peace. He had come to give peace to all men of good will. Such a greeting on the lips of Mary is a prayer and Mary's prayers are always heard. Elizabeth in consequence is filled with the Holy Spirit and in His light recognizes the dignity of the Mother of God, feels the sanctifying power of Mary's yet unborn Child as her own offspring leaps with joy in her womb at the sound of Mary's voice. Filled with holy joy she exclaims, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And whence is this to me that the

Mother of my Lord should come to me? For, behold, as soon as the voice of your salutation sounded in my ears, the Infant in my womb leaped with joy. And blessed are you that have believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to you by the Lord." Mary, blessed among all women, cannot but agree. Her heart is overflowing with grateful joy as she breaks forth into her Magnificat of praise and thanksgiving ('My soul, it Magnifies the Lord'). Her soul must praise the Lord, her mind rejoice in her Saviour. God has chosen her, the humble maid of Nazareth, and done great things to her, so that all generations shall call her blessed. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly, has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent away empty. He has fulfilled the promises made to the fathers of old and sent the long-expected Messiah. And Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months (Luke 1:39-56).

In the House of Elizabeth

For three months, the house of Elizabeth presents us with an example of the most appealing charity on the part of Mary. Charity acts through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy; both were practised by the blessed Mother of God, but especially the latter. Notwithstanding the great hardships which a journey in those days meant, Mary resolutely set out on her way and then gave her kinswoman all the assistance she needed during the remaining weeks of her expectancy.

Greater yet was the spiritual assistance Mary rendered Elizabeth. She knew herself to be the Mother of Christ and through her Divine Son wished to contribute to the sanctification of the world, first of all, to that of the holy precursor of Jesus. She wished to have others to share in her happiness and with her praise, and give thanks to God for

the great mystery He had wrought in her. In her humility, however, she could not bring herself to speak about it; in fact, she had not mentioned it in the beginning even to Saint Joseph. But here with Elizabeth she was in the presence of a chosen soul, illumined by the Holy Spirit Himself as to what had happened, and so she could speak freely. Through the words of Elizabeth she had learned of the effect of her visit on the latter's child. If such was the effect of her first meeting with Elizabeth, the spiritual favours bestowed upon the latter and her child must have increased immeasurably during the three months of her sojourn. Intense gratitude filled the hearts of these two women, and Mary spoke also the mind of Elizabeth when in the Magnificat she poured out the sentiments of her grateful love. May we not suppose that it was the daily prayer of Mary and Elizabeth, and that it made the latter's home a sanctuary of piety, of peace, and holy joy? In such an atmosphere, the members of the household could not but daily grow in virtue and holiness.

Giving Christ to the Poor

We, too, bear God within us and it is through our cooperation that Jesus desires to save and sanctify souls. The manner of doing it, suggested by the mystery of the Visitation, is that of humble and loving service rendered to our fellow-men, for the sake of Christ. All around us are the poor, the distressed, the sick, the ignorant, the wayward, and forsaken; there is an immense field for the practice of the corporal as well as the spiritual works of mercy. But there is only one that can really and truly alleviate the sorrows of the heart and heal the wounds of the soul, and that is Jesus, the Saviour of the world. Christian charity must have for its ultimate end to bring Christ into the lives of our fellow-men, relatives, acquaintances, friends, and companions. Have we seriously tried to do this? Do we speak of Him to those in

sorrow? Do we invite them, take them with us to Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist? Could we not by word and example encourage more frequent attendance at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and reception of Holy Communion? In the Blessed Eucharist, Jesus Himself will act as the Good Samaritan; He will grant forgiveness of sin, strength and patience, peace, such as the world cannot give. Are we willing to take upon ourselves hardships in the practice of charity as Mary did in the mystery of the Visitation? Loving with the love of Christ and for the sake of Christ makes us generous.

The mystery also contains a very practical lesson for expectant mothers. The greatest act of charity they can do to their as yet unborn child is to take it into the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist, especially through the reception of Holy Communion.

Charity Unlimited

Indeed every act by which we prevent sin in our fellow-men, bring them closer to God and inspire them with a greater love of virtue, is an act of charity. Saint Paul calls our attention to the well-nigh innumerable ways and manners in which such charity can be practised, and often with so much more effectiveness the less the act is recognized as such, and the more humble and inconspicuous it is. It is a wide field for the practice of charity to which the Apostle calls our attention when he writes, "Charity is patient, is kind; charity does not envy, is not pretentious, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, is not self-seeking, is not provoked; thinks no evil, does not rejoice over wickedness, but rejoices with the truth; it bears with all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

We were redeemed because God loved us, and it is our greatest privilege, through the practice of charity, to co-

operate in the salvation and sanctification of souls. Our Blessed Mother gives the example. The rosary leads to the practice of charity and through charity to Jesus, in Whom alone there is salvation.

The Nativity

The census to be taken up in Palestine, the consequent journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, the great crowds that occupied all available space in the town were the circumstances foreseen and ordained by Divine



Providence to bring the

Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph to the stable in which, "While all things were in quiet silence and the night was in the midst of her course, Your Almighty Word, O Lord, came from heaven, from Your royal throne" (Introit or Entrance Antiphon (Chant) of Sunday within Octave of Christmas).

The Holy Night

"And Mary brought forth her first-born Son and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." All is silent around the stable; Mary and Joseph are the only representatives of mankind to pay homage to God made man, by their faith and loving acceptance of the hardships and privations of poverty, freely chosen by the Lord of heaven and earth for Himself. Out on the plains, shepherds are watching their flocks. "And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of God shone round about them, and they feared exceedingly." The shepherds need not fear; the meaning of the wonderful things they behold is heavenly joy and peace to be offered to the world, for "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be to all the people; for there has been born to you today in the town of David, a Saviour, who

is Christ the Lord." A sign is given them by which they will recognize this newborn Saviour. "You will find an Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." A multitude of heavenly spirits now appears above them high up in the air, singing words and melodies such as the world had never heard before, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men of good will." Having delivered their message, the angels return to heaven and the shepherds are again alone in the fields. But their mind is made up at once, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. So they went with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph and the Babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen, they understood what had been told them concerning this child." . . . "And they returned glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen." All people that heard the story marvelled, and "Mary kept in mind all these words, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:1-20).

The Mother of God

Mary now beholds for the first time Him, whom she had conceived of the Holy Spirit; even His Infant features radiate the brightness of Eternal Light and the image of the Father's substance. Like a ray of light, He has entered this world without injury to His blessed Mother's virginity. He, the mighty God, who has given to nature its laws, can also suspend them. Mary is now truly the Mother of God, the Virgin Mother of Christ. Holy Church has at all times believed this truth and vigorously asserted it against those who would deny it. Thus, she speaks at the Council of Ephesus in the year 431: "If any one deny that the holy Virgin is the Mother of God, let him be anathema." And the Second Council of Nicea in 787 repeats, "We believe that Mary is really and truly the Mother of God, because she bore one of

the persons of the Most Blessed Trinity, Jesus Christ, Our Lord, according to the flesh." Let us rejoice and give thanks, for Mary the Mother of God is also our Mother.

The Mystery Perpetuated

The events of that holy night have passed into history; yet they live on, not only in commemoration, but in sacramental reality. The stable of Bethlehem in that silent holy night became the first Catholic church, harbouring the real presence of the God-Man; since then, other Bethlehems have arisen, other mangers have been prepared, and the same Almighty Word of God, the first-born Son of the Virgin Mary, hidden beneath the species of bread and wine, comes down from heaven, from His royal throne. The mystery of this holy night has a still greater significance for us.

Bethlehem means "house of bread," and in the truest sense of the word, a Catholic church is a Bethlehem, a house of bread, in which He who is the true bread of life gives Himself to the faithful in Holy Communion. If prayerful reflection upon this mystery should arouse in us the desire to have been present at Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph and the shepherds to adore the Infant in the manger, this desire, enlightened by faith, will take us to the altar; here we have the stable and the manger, here the permanent holy night. The flickering light of the sanctuary lamp takes the place of the stars that twinkled their delight on the shepherds and the stable, the splendour of the liturgy at the solemn celebration of the sacred mysteries may well remind us of the brightness of God, that shone round about the shepherds, and those jubilant melodies sung by the angels.

Reception Given to Jesus

The story of the birth of our Blessed Saviour illustrates the truth of Saint John's statement that Jesus came into His own

and His own did not receive Him. The rest of the life of Jesus and the history of the Church down to our day, furnishes further evidence of this truth. The vast majority of those whom He came to save do not know Him; His teaching is not accepted, His Eucharistic presence not known or ignored. How much coldness and indifference is not shown to this mystery even by many of the members of the Church. Should we not endeavour to make up for this lack of faith and love by an ardent devotion to the Blessed Eucharist? How much more reason than the psalmist do we have to say with him, "I will compass Your altar, O Lord, that I may hear the voice of praise and tell of all Your wondrous works. I have loved the beauty of Your house, O Lord, and the place where Your glory dwells." (Psalm 25:6-8 in the Vulgate. It is Psalm 26:6-8 in the Hebrew.) And when we leave the Eucharistic presence let us take with us the remembrance of our Emmanuel and like the shepherds praise and glorify God, giving testimony to the world around us of the peace and happiness that is found with Jesus.

More Priests

The Eucharistic presence of Our Lord is inseparable from the priesthood. The priest, through the words of the consecration, brings down upon the altar the Son of the Eternal Father; in this fact, there lies a wonderful similarity between the mission of the blessed Mother and the office of the priest. Mary cannot but be eager to see the number of priests increased so that the mystery of Bethlehem may be perpetuated and spread throughout the world, that glory be given to God in the highest and men may find peace in Jesus, the Prince of peace. Catholic parents with a grateful appreciation of this mystery will feel proud to give their sons to the service of the altar, and also to pray and work for an increase of priestly vocations.

The mystery of the Rosary leads us to Bethlehem of Judah and thence to the Bethlehems of the Catholic Church, scattered all over the world. He who lay in the manger as an Infant is present in the Blessed Eucharist as our High Priest, victim, bread of life. O come, let us adore Him, love Him the more, the less He is loved in the world. And let us not forget to pray for an increase of priestly vocations for the service of our Eucharistic Emmanuel. All this will console and delight our blessed Mother and be a source of untold blessings for the world.

The Presentation

Two events are commemorated in this mystery, the purification of our blessed mother and the presentation of Jesus.

According to Jewish law a mother, after having given birth to a boy, was considered legally unclean for forty days.

At the end of this period, she had to present herself in the temple, if possible, to be declared clean. The ceremonies connected with this act called for a sacrifice of expiation for which a dove was used, and the burnt offering of a lamb. In the case of a poor mother, a dove was substituted for the lamb, and so we read that Mary, being poor, offered a pair of turtle doves. The second event is the ransoming of Jesus. This ceremony was to keep alive the memory of the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt. The last plague which God sent upon the Egyptians was the death of their firstborn sons, whereas the firstborn sons of the Israelites were saved. In memory of this event, God ordained that the firstborn son of every Jewish family was to be dedicated to His service. However, soon after this God chose the tribe of Levi for the performance of all priestly functions. Since then the first-born sons of all the other tribes had to be presented in the temple and to be ransomed from the original obligation by the payment of a fixed sum of money.

Although it was not necessary that the child himself should be brought to the temple, this was generally done. It is in the observance of these two laws that we find Mary with her Infant Child in the temple.



Mary's Humility

Since the birth of Jesus had been miraculous, a virginal birth, Mary did not fall under the law. However, to claim exemption would have necessitated revelation of this mystery, and that was not the will of God at the time. Grateful that her privilege thus could remain hidden, Mary humbly submits to this law like the other mothers of Israel. She is the handmaid of the Lord with no other desire but that the will of God should be done by her and in her.

Presentation of Jesus

The presentation of Jesus, though outwardly like that of all the other firstborn sons of the Jews, is yet totally different. For Jesus, it is not a release from, but the first external consecration of Himself to, the priestly office. True, He will not act as a priest of the order of Levi, but He is priest and victim, first in the bloody sacrifice of the cross and then to the end of time in the Eucharistic sacrifice, as priest of the order of Melchisedech. In fact, the priesthood of the Old Testament and all its sacrifices are but types and figures of His priesthood and sacrifice. Jesus, even as an Infant, has the full use of reason and, though not spoken audibly, the words of the prophet are in His heart, "Sacrifice and oblation You would not, but a body You have fitted to Me; in holocausts and sin-offerings You have had no pleasure. Then said I, 'Behold I come to do Your will O God'." (This Old Testament passage is quoted in the New Testament at Hebrews 10:5-7).

A Sign Contradicted

There lived at the time in Jerusalem a holy old man by the name of Simeon. He had received from the Holy Spirit the assurance that he would not die before having seen the

Messiah for whose coming he had prayed all his life. Simeon was in the temple as Mary and Joseph brought in the child Jesus and, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he recognizes in Him at once the promised Saviour. He takes the Child into his arms, his heart overflowing with gratitude. Now he can die in peace, for his eyes have seen the light sent for the illumination of the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. But salvation will depend upon the attitude which men take toward this Child. And Simeon said to Mary His Mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted. And your own soul a sword shall pierce, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:25-35). It will be so because the cross of Christ shall be a folly to the Gentiles and a scandal to the Jews, but to those that are called, the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:23). So we, too, must take our stand with regard to Christ. Let it be one of loyal and generous service. Let us offer ourselves to Him in His own words, whatever the call may be, "Behold I come to do Your will."

The Christian's Presentation

We, too, had our presentation when through Baptism we were cleansed from sin, incorporated into Christ and dedicated to the service of God. We repeated this consecration again and again during life, and that with particular solemnity on some outstanding occasions like the day of our first Holy Communion, the day of profession for Religious, the ordination day for priests. All these latter acts of consecration usually are made in connection with the Eucharistic Sacrifice; this illustrates our desire to unite our work and toil in God's service with that of our Divine High Priest and Victim for the accomplishment of His mission as well as our conviction that courage and strength to

persevere on our sacrificial path flows from the Saviour's sacrifice.

Consecrated Lives

What we should do in order to make our lives fruitful for our own salvation and that of others is suggested by the persons acting in this mystery of the Presentation. The example of Simeon points to continuous prayer. There can be no love of Christ without at least praying for the success of the cause of Christ. From Mary we learn to be humble and not to boast of our merits or of the good we do. We do no favour to God by living for God, but God does an exceedingly great favour to us by accepting our service. What we do we can do only through His grace and even after we have done all we could do we must look upon ourselves as useless servants who have done nothing but their duty. For the lover of Christ the wish, the example, the interests of Jesus are a command. Narrow selfishness has time and energy for amassing the goods of this world, for securing comfort and pleasure, but has neither for the advancement of the cause of Christ. This is the reason why the cause of Christ does not make better progress in the world. The Presentation suggests particularly to priests and Religious the spirit of joyous self-immolation. Their very state of life is synonymous with it. They offered themselves on the day of their ordination or profession; they were called by name and they answered with a joyful adsum, 'present'. Let them not be sorry for what they have done, nor take back what they have given, when in the course of time God takes them at their word and gives them to drink of the cup of suffering. The grain of wheat must give up its own life in order to live in the grains that grow from it.

The mystery of the Presentation thus understood leads to Jesus, Priest and Victim in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. It points to prayer, humility, the spirit of sacrifice and joyous self-

immolation in the pursuance of the interests of God and souls. They are the means by which to overcome the selfishness and worldliness of men, the pleasure-seeking and flight from the cross that interfere so much with the following of Christ and the extension of His Kingdom. Also in our case it is true that, "This child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many," Our success, perseverance and salvation depend upon the attitude we take toward Jesus.

The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

According to the law, every Israelite, beginning with the age of twelve, was bound to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the principal feasts, especially for Easter (or Passover). Although Jesus most probably had made this pilgrimage more than once before, the one He made at the age of twelve is recorded in the Gospel, because it was the first time He made it as a "son of the law," that is, as one bound by law, and because of the extraordinary circumstances connected with it.



Jesus Lost

At the end of the customary celebrations, Mary and Joseph set out on their return journey to Nazareth. Owing to the large crowds and to the custom that members of the same family would often travel in separate groups, it is easy to understand how Jesus could stay behind without either Mary or Joseph noticing His absence. It was only in the evening, when the groups arrived at the camping place previously agreed upon, and members of the family would meet again, that the loss of Jesus was discovered. Anxiously Mary and Joseph inquired with other groups and passers-by whether they had any knowledge of Jesus' whereabouts, but no information could be obtained. With hearts torn by grief, they set out at once for Jerusalem and spent the whole following day in seeking Jesus.

Jesus in the Temple

Without the knowledge of Mary and Joseph, Jesus had remained in the temple at Jerusalem. It had become a custom for doctors of the law to set themselves up in the temple halls, interpreting the law and answering questions for the benefit of any one who might be interested. On the occasion of the great feasts, large crowds of people would gather around them, glad to have the opportunity to hear the famous teachers of Israel. Jesus had joined one of these groups. He soon aroused the attention of the doctors and the bystanders by the wisdom of His questions and answers as well as by the charm of His personality and speech.

Questions Asked

We do not know what questions Jesus asked those learned men, but it would not seem far-fetched to suppose that they had to do with prophecies regarding the Messiah and the fulfilment of some of them within recent years. He may have put them through a little examination in contemporary history. Had they ever heard or did they remember the wonderful events that had taken place in Bethlehem about twelve years before this, a story told by shepherds, of angels appearing and announcing the birth of the Saviour? Did they know the story of a little boy being brought to the temple forty days later and of a holy old man by the name of Simeon who said some very striking things about the boy? And surely, they must remember those strange men coming from the East and inquiring in Jerusalem about the newborn King of the Jews! They themselves had directed those men to Bethlehem; did they follow up this strange event, especially when they heard about the massacre of so many little boys in Bethlehem and surroundings, because those Magi did not return to Herod? Could these events not have been the fulfilment of certain prophecies? Such and similar questions on the part of Jesus seem very likely in view of the purpose of this first public manifestation of Himself. He

wished to make the leaders of Israel more observant of current events and to prepare them for His public life to begin eighteen years later. But such questions must have kept those doctors of the law and the people in suspense and amazement. Other doctors and people were attracted and Jesus became the centre of a large crowd of people.

Jesus Found

It was in such environment that Mary and Joseph found Jesus after three days' searching. Their first reaction is unbounded joy; but then the Mother's tender heart is eager to know whether there had been any fault on her or Joseph's part that Jesus had been left behind. She asks, "Son, why have You done so to us? Behold, Your father and I have been seeking You sorrowing." No, there had been no fault on either her or Joseph's part, nor had Jesus Himself been guilty of any disobedience. But Jesus is not only the Son of Mary but also the Son of the Eternal Father, He is the God-Man and the Saviour, and the present event is part of His mission. And He said to them, "How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" According to the Father's will the time had come to call the attention of the teachers and leaders of the people to truths and events which would help to direct them to Him in due time, provided they were of good will. That was doing the Father's business, and to that business He must attend above all others. Mary did not understand the full import of these words of Jesus, but she bowed in all humility to the will of God and she kept all these things carefully in her heart to ponder over them in years to come. Above all, she is happy that no estrangement has arisen between her and Jesus; He remains her loving Child. And He went down with them to Nazareth and was subject to them (Luke 2:41-52).

Souls in Distress

The mystery gives an answer to so many problems of distressed and sorrowful hearts. Fear and doubt and the sense of abandonment are not signs that things are going badly with us spiritually. Interior trials fall to the lot of all true lovers of God; they should not trick us into doing things which might bring on a real loss of God, through mortal sin. The sense of abandonment in particular is invaluable for the purification of the soul. It atones for sin by which in one way or other we have abandoned God, choosing our will in preference to His. But whilst we may thus experience intense mental pain, sorrow and discouragement, God is and acts within us. After a particularly violent temptation, when she had thought herself abandoned by God, Saint Teresa asked Jesus where He had been during that time, and she received the answer that He had been right within her.

Seeking Jesus

After the example of Mary and Joseph, we must seek Jesus in such a situation. The fact that we are temples of God and the Holy Spirit dwells within us directs us to where He should be sought. Let us enter this temple of our souls and with unwavering faith and trust in the goodness of God humble ourselves, acknowledging ourselves unworthy of experiencing the sweetness of His presence. Let us adore the incomprehensible but always loving designs of Divine Providence, and by and by, we shall feel peace return through the conviction that we have not lost Him, that He is still with us. He will speak to us as He spoke to the apostles during the storm on the lake, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" (Matthew 8:26)

And since Jesus abides with us in the Blessed Sacrament, we must seek Him also there. From the tabernacle He will speak

to us of love and obedience unto death, direct our attention to the glory of the way of the cross that leads to the possession of eternal peace. We shall sense His love which allowed this trial to come upon us only to draw us closer to His Sacred Heart.

As we, ourselves thus seek and find Jesus and in Him the peace of our souls, so we should be helpful to others in seeking and finding Jesus. Many souls there are, indeed, harassed by doubts and fears and despondency, sinners who in a weak moment yielded to their evil passions and now find out that it is a bitter and an evil thing to have forsaken the Lord; there are those separated brethren of ours outside the true Church, who feel the emptiness of their impoverished religion and seek the full truth of Christ that alone can satisfy the heart. They all need help.

Whether the sense of abandonment is a punishment or a trial, our reaction must be the same; we must seek Jesus with love and confidence. He will not be angry with the sinner forever, nor will He hide Himself forever from loving souls, He, whose delight it is to be with the children of men. We shall find Him and sorrow shall be turned into joy. Through meditation on the mysteries of the rosary, our Lady of Fatima directs our attention to the fountains of peace, and she will assist us in finding them in the Heart of her Divine Son through her own immaculate and motherly heart.

The Message of the Sorrowful Mysteries



Introduction

Whereas in the Joyful Mysteries the sacred writers record at some length the part which Mary played in them, the same writers are silent about her part in the sorrowful mysteries. All that we learn from them is that the Mother of Jesus stood beneath the cross, and that from the cross Jesus recommended her to Saint John as his Mother, and Saint John to her as her son. But what we know about Mary and her relation to Jesus is sufficient to supply the rest. Mary shared in the sufferings of her Divine Son as no other human person ever did or could have done, and she did it with sentiments of complete submission to the will of God and love for souls.

The Sorrowful Mysteries of the rosary illustrate the sacrificial character of the Christian life. The crosses of life are manifold, but they can all be reduced to the one or other of the sufferings commemorated in these sorrowful mysteries. In particular they are: Fear, anxiety, disgust experienced with regard to the crosses that actually afflict us or that we see approaching: bodily pain, humiliation, the labours and hardships imposed upon us by our vocational duties, bitterness against those whom we consider the cause of our suffering, the urge to throw off the cross when patience gives out.

The general lesson inculcated by these mysteries is patience, the spirit of penance and love of the cross, and that is the object our Lady of Fatima had in view when she asked for meditation on the mysteries of the rosary.

The Agony

After the Last Supper, Jesus accompanied by his apostles, went out to Mount Olivet, on the Western slope of which was the Garden of Gethsemani. He left eight apostles at the gate, whilst He with Peter, John and James proceeded farther into the garden. The latter three were the apostles who had witnessed the transfiguration on Mount Thabor; now they were to witness its counterpart.



All of a sudden, Jesus began to grow sad, to fear and to tremble, and He said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death. Stay you here and watch with me." Then He withdrew from them as far as a stone's throw and the terrible agony set in. Staggering under the weight of crushing fear He falls to the ground, and with an expression of grief and helplessness in His voice, such as the apostles had never witnessed before. He prayed, "Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass away from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Restless and exhausted He rises after some time and returns to the three apostles, seeking consolation, some words of sympathy, or at least the assurance that they were watching with Him in their prayers. Yet He finds them asleep; asleep, they His trusted friends, whilst His betrayer is awake and active. We sense the disappointment of the Saviour's Heart in that gentle reproach: "Could you not watch one hour with Me? Watch all of you and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Without having found the consolation He had sought, Jesus returns to His former place and the agony continues. Abysmal as may be His sorrow and furiously as Hell may rage around Him, He never wavers in His attitude towards His Father; not His Will but the Will of the Father is to be done. Again, He arises and seeks the company of the apostles; should He not have expected that after the previous warning, they would have kept awake? Yet He finds them asleep the second time, and without waking them He returns to prayer. What the apostles did not give Him is now brought to Him by a messenger of His Heavenly Father, "And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven strengthening Him." What could that consolation of the angel have been? The one thing that Jesus craved above all others, namely, that His Father was pleased with Him and that souls would be saved through His suffering. We may assume that in that moment He also felt the strength and consolation that His Passion would bring to souls of coming ages in their sufferings, the hope of salvation it would give them, the courage that would lead them to victory and heavenly glory.

Thus, Jesus was prepared for the last phase of His agony. It was the most fearful, and He prayed the more that, if it were the Father's Will the chalice would pass away from Him. Just as He prayed and saw that this was not the will of the Father, but that He should rather drink the chalice of suffering, the agony became so intense that it pressed the blood out of His pores and like drops of perspiration, it trickled down upon the ground. At last, the agony came to an end. Quiet and composure returned to His soul, and He rejoined the apostles. As far as He was concerned, they now could sleep and rest, but there was no time left; the traitor was approaching.

What was it that caused this terrible agony of our Blessed Saviour? It was the sight of the sufferings He was to endure,

the malice of the sins for which He was to suffer, the ingratitude of men and the uselessness of His Passion for so many. Although Jesus had known these things throughout His life, it had been the Will of the Father that their full impact should be felt only as the terrors of the Passion were to break in upon Him. And so there are before His all-seeing eyes the traitor doing his treacherous work, as well as the injustice of His trials before the Jewish Council and the Roman governor. He beholds Himself heaped with indignity, mocked, spat upon, scourged, crowned with thorns, nailed to the cross, hated and rejected by the people He loved so much, His saving blood called down upon them as a curse. The very thought of such sufferings is enough to fill the mind with the utmost horror. But Jesus also suffered as the Head of His Mystical Body, the Church. Into His sufferings enter as bitter ingredients all injustice inflicted upon the Church in the course of centuries, the tortures endured by the martyrs, the sorrows of every description that ever fell to the lot of His followers. He suffers for the sins of the whole world and as God-Man He grasps the whole meanness, hatefulness, contemptibility, the ghastly hideousness of sin. His loving Heart feels the ingratitude of men and the uselessness of His Passion for millions of them.

How few there are that think of His sufferings and thank Him for His love; how few that serve Him with the love and loyalty that He deserves. How much half-heartedness, selfishness, haggling and bartering there is in His service, how little is given, how many conditions and reservations attached to even that little. Must not the tempter have pointed mockingly with fiendish glee to an ungrateful world forgetful of Him, "And for such people you are going to endure such terrible suffering?" No wonder He falls to the ground in utter exhaustion, cries to His Heavenly Father that this chalice might pass away from Him, and no wonder that bloody perspiration runs down His body.

Prayerful reflection on this mystery, as requested by our Lady of Fatima, will disclose to us its significance. In His agony, Jesus atones for the rebellion of sin. The essential element in sin is its opposition to the Will of God by way of simple rejection or defiant rebellion against it and a substitution in its place of the human will. Rebellion against the Will of God has assumed gigantic proportions. God's very existence is denied, His authority ignored in education, in the home and family, in business and politics.

If such an attitude is found among the enemies of God, it must deeply hurt the Heart of Jesus, the great Lover of men, but it hurts more when it is found among those who call themselves His friends and followers. There are Catholics for whom the Will of God means practically nothing. They go their own way in arranging the affairs of their lives. They flee from the cross and refuse to carry the yoke of the Lord. If they pray at all, it is not with submission to the Will of God, but with insistence upon their own will. Their will must be done or else they give up their faith, quit the Church. It is for the pride of this rebellion that Jesus atones in His agony, when crushed by the weight of all the world's sins, He prays that not His but His Father's Will be done.

The Christian's reaction to the agony of our Blessed Saviour will be a greater readiness to submit to the Will of God under all circumstances, and to offer up the repugnance which nature may experience, in atonement for all rebellion against the Will of God. By doing this we can in the truest sense of the word, offer consolation to Jesus in His agony; whatever is done now, was known to Him and gave Him comfort in that terrible hour of Gethsemani. He sought our consolation as His eyes peered into the future just as He sought the consolation of His apostles. The fact that He found so little of it, is the reason for the touching complaint of the Sacred Heart to Saint Margaret Mary about the

coldness and indifference of so many souls, even such as are consecrated to Him in the priestly and religious state. For the same reason He requested the saint to spend the hour before midnight from Thursday to Friday before the tabernacle to bear Him company, to beg the Father's pardon for sinners, to share in some way the bitterness He experienced in that hour of agony.

This mystery thus brings the agonizing Saviour closer to us. It arouses our compassion, as well as sorrow for our past lack of conformity with the Will of God; it prompts us henceforth to submit to the Will of God. We learn to pray with Him, our Divine Redeemer, even in the bitterest trial, "Not my will but Yours be done." But this is also the most ardent desire of our Blessed Mother of Fatima, whose never changing attitude of will was, "Be it done to me according to Your word."

The Scourging

Pilate was fully convinced of the innocence of Jesus, but politician and coward that he was, he did not have the courage of his conviction, and so he rather preferred expediency to justice. In order to appease the Jews, he had Jesus scourged. Pilate may have believed that after this the Jews would desist from asking for the death penalty. The sacred writers do not enter into the details of the scourging, since these were known to their readers; they simply record the order of Pilate, "that Jesus be scourged." (Matthew 27:26).



Jesus most probably suffered the Roman scourging. This punishment was administered with a whip which looked much like the British cat-o'-nine-tails and usually little iron balls or hooks were tied into the leather thongs. Moreover, the Roman scourging was not limited to any number of blows; that was left to the judges, or more often to the soldiers who carried out the sentence and as a rule were men of a cruel and inhuman type. So Jesus is stripped of His garments, His wrists are tied to the top of the column of flagellation, so that His feet barely reach the ground, and the terrible scourging begins.

We shudder as we think of the Most Holy subjected to the indignities of a public whipping. The blows rain down on His innocent body, bluish streaks appear, the flesh is lifted in horrid welts; soon the skin breaks and shreds of skin and flesh are hurled all around by the swishing lashes; the blood runs down in streams. The victim is writhing in pain and half-

suppressed moans escape from His lips. At last, the torture is over; the hands of Jesus are loosed and utterly exhausted He drops to the ground and there lies in His own blood. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of old, "I have become even as a worm and no man, the outcast of humanity and the castaway of the people." (Psalm 21:7 in the Vulgate. It is Psalm 22:6 in the Hebrew.) And the prophet Isaiah says of Him, "There is no beauty in Him nor comeliness, despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity. Surely, He has borne our infirmities, and we have thought Him as it were a leper and as one struck by God and afflicted." (Isaiah 53:2-4).

Why did Jesus submit to such a dreadful suffering? "He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins." By this terrible scourging, He wished to atone above all for the sins of the flesh. As our Blessed Lady of Fatima revealed, more souls are in hell because of impurity than because of any other sin. The same has always been the opinion of spiritual writers. The mystery of the scourging, therefore, has a special message for our times. As in the days of the deluge, when God destroyed the human race because of the sins of the flesh, so now man has become flesh. The sins of the flesh are glorified in the press, on the screen, over the radio; they are represented no longer as sins, but as the lawful gratification of nature, the romance of youth, the zest of adult age. And so the flesh rules the world and ruins souls. But neither the fact that millions of men have become the slaves of this vice, nor the fact that the world glorifies it, can change its sinful, wicked nature. The impure shall not enter into the Kingdom of God.

The sins of the flesh are so grievous because they poison the very fountains of life and desecrate the noble and wonderful faculty given to man for the procreation of the human race, for the establishment of family and home. Men take the

pleasures and refuse to pay the price; sins of the flesh are nothing but selfishness and cowardice parading under the mask of love.

In the case of the Christian, who through Baptism has been made a temple of God, these sins moreover constitute a desecration of that temple. Saint Paul impresses this idea upon the early Christians; converts from Judaism as well as those from paganism well understood that a temple is a holy place and a desecration of it a terrible sacrilege. To the present day Holy Church reminds the faithful of the same truth when in the ceremonies of Baptism (in the ritual of Saint Pius V) she directs the priest to say to the person to be baptized, "Receive the sign of the cross upon your forehead and upon your heart; take unto you the faith in the heavenly commandments, and be you such in your ways that you may be fit henceforth to be a temple of God." More holy than the temple of stone is the living temple of man. The conclusion then drawn by Saint Paul is clear, "If any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which you are" (1 Corinthians 3:17). The believing Catholic is filled with horror when he sees or reads about the desecration of churches, when altars and tabernacles are demolished, the holy vessels broken, the holy Species thrown upon the floor and trampled upon. So do the sins of the flesh desecrate the living temple of God, making it the dwelling place of the devil. How great the sin of impurity must be we can gather from the terrors of the scourging which God suffered in order to atone for it.

Our Lady of Fatima, emphatically insists upon the necessity of penance, that is, doing things that are painful, thus to atone for the unlawful pleasure derived from sin. Holy Church obliges the faithful, particularly during the holy season of Lent, to the performance of penitential works, especially fasting. However, fasting in the wider sense

comprises all works of mortification. There are many works that are painful and cause considerable hardship. To get up early in the morning in order to assist at the Eucharistic Sacrifice of atonement, to continue patiently and faithfully at a monotonous duty, to perform the one or the other work of mercy when this is inconvenient, to bear with patience, sickness, privation, heat, cold, the faults and failings of others are all such penitential works. If performed in the spirit of humility and contrition, God will accept them as reparation for sins committed. At the same time, they strengthen the will and merit abundant grace, so that in future, we may be stronger in temptation and the more surely keep holy the temple of God in our souls.

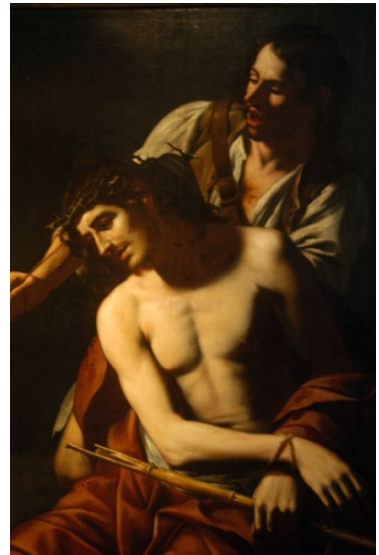
It is not only atonement for the sins of impurity that this mystery calls for, but it also reminds the Christian of his positive duty to be pure. If we desire to live up to the ideal of Christian perfection, we must sublimate our thoughts; lift them up to pure and holy things. As the Apostle says, we must mind the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father; we must resist evil thoughts as soon as we become aware of them, for the longer they are allowed to linger on, the stronger they grow. The more we reflect on ourselves as the sacred temples of God, the more the very thought of impurity will horrify us, and the more we shall be inflamed with love for purity. A pure life does not make a man sad and gloomy, but rather fills him with heavenly peace; it gives a foretaste of the bliss of the saints in heaven, who in the temple not made by the hands of men, not only delight in the thought of God as in this life, but see Him, face to face. And will not love between the married as well as between young people contemplating marriage be immeasurably nobler and more soul-satisfying, if the lover sees in the beloved not only the physical charms of the body, but the spiritual beauty of the soul resplendent with the splendour of God's grace? Such love will be

reflected in conduct above all, that carefully keeps from the beloved whatever might be harmful, and that is above the greatest of all misfortunes, sin.

This is the message of the mystery of the scourging for our times. From the spirit of fornication, deliver us, O Lord. Mother most pure, pray for us.

The Crowning with Thorns

After the scourging Jesus was to be taken to Pilate for the final verdict. But the governor was still busy and the guards in charge of Jesus had to wait. So these cruel men looked for some sport to pass away the time. They now remembered that the Jews had accused Jesus of calling Himself the king of the Jews. That idea suggested some royal sport, the crowning of Jesus as king.



At once, the soldiers took Jesus to a broken pillar and seated Him on it. They then tore off his garments again and threw over Him a ragged purple cloak, similar to those worn by Roman generals in a triumph. From the branches of a prickly bush, provided with long and sharp thorns, they plaited a thick wreath; now they had a royal crown. This they put on His head, pressing it down so as to make it fit. With burning pain, the thorns penetrate into the scalp, injuring even the bone of the skull. The blood again begins to flow. His hair, already matted by the blood of the scourging, becomes a twisted and disorderly mass; blood is trickling down over His forehead and cheeks, forming around His eyes, nose and lips a dark unsightly crust. At last, to finish their preparation - they put into His fettered hands a reed as royal sceptre and all is ready for the sport. Calling together the other soldiers of the cohort these cruel men now march around Jesus in derision, genuflect and mockingly salute Him with the words, "Hail, King of the Jews." Then standing before Him, they spit upon Him, take the reed out of His hands and with it strike Him on His thorn-crowned head. And so the sport continues while the all-

seeing, outraged majesty of God veils His face and angels weep and tremble.

The crowning of Jesus with thorns is the atonement for the sins of pride; pride, the root from which all other sins have sprung. It is a mystery of iniquity that beings created by God and endowed with intelligence should attempt to be like unto God their Creator. But so did Lucifer in heaven, and so did men on earth. As in the case of Lucifer, so in the case of men, their own exaltation and the excellence of the gifts which they had received, blinded them to their own nothingness before God. We have seen in our own days how men arrogate to themselves divine authority, attempting to dethrone God, to abrogate the Ten Commandments and to substitute in their place their own hell-inspired principles.

All heresies and rebellions have their origin in pride. In the former, the human mind refuses to accept the truth revealed by God, and in the latter men refuse to render obedience to the authority appointed by God. Pride enters into almost every phase of human life. Disrespect for God's representatives, destructive criticism that undermines authority, defiance and lawlessness are the poisonous fruits growing from the same root of pride. But also contempt of our fellow-man, all haughty and supercilious treatment meted out to him, all disregard of His rights, all pharisaical self-complacency that sees the good in oneself and is blind to the good in others, all this is pride in action which put the crown of thorns upon our Saviour's head. By the pain and humiliation of His crowning with thorns, He atoned for it.

We even recognize some particular forms of human pride in the various phases of Our Lord's crowning. In the head crowned with thorns, we see atoned the pride and vainglorious thoughts and desires that lead to rebellion against God, to contempt and oppression of fellow-men. The

purple cloak may well remind us of the pride and vanity displayed in the fashions of the world, that sinful desire to attract attention, to call forth admiration, to outshine others. The reed in the hands of our thorn-crowned Saviour atones for the lust for power, for tyranny of imposing one's own will upon others and using violence against such as attempt to resist. The mockery of Christ's divine and royal authority through the genuflection of the soldiers, how it atones for the lack of respect for God and holy things, the desecration of churches, the contempt for which the temple of God in our neighbour's soul is treated, those haughty, sarcastic gestures, by which we ridicule and vilify our fellow-men! Jesus is spat upon and struck in the face; but is it not precisely the face, our face, upon which the most careful attention is bestowed so that it may charm, subdue and enslave? So much attention is given to physical beauty and so little interest shown in the beauty of the soul.

There is a painting that represents Our Blessed Saviour crowned with thorns and holding in His fettered hands the reed, behind the tabernacle door. The picture is deeply significant. Jesus, truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, still receives from millions of men nothing but contempt, coldness and indifference; even marks of reverence are frequently given to Him in such a way as to create the impression of mockery rather than of faith. So we wish to offer to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament all reverence and love, all adoration and glorification due to Him to atone for the unspeakable humiliations and indignities which He endured in the crowning with thorns.

We wish to atone furthermore by reverence and obedience to the representatives of the Divine King in the Church, of whom Jesus Himself has said, "He that hears you, hears Me; and he who despises you, despises Me" (Luke 10:16). And since there is no authority except from God, every act of

obedience rendered because of God, is also an act of reparation for the rebellion of pride, that put the crown of thorns upon the head of Jesus. On the other hand, wherever human authority forgets its dependence upon divine authority and in the rebellious spirit of Lucifer, demands things which would be a denial of Christ, the King, there can be but one answer, and that is loyalty to Christ even unto death.

We can, furthermore, atone for the sins of pride by humble reverence and respect for our fellow-men as the images and temples of God and the redeemed of Christ, and that, the more effectively, the lowlier they are whom we thus honour. But the most fitting, though the most painful, will be the reparation that is rendered to Jesus by true humility. The humble will not consider themselves better than their fellow-men, will not prefer themselves to them; they will through modesty in dress and speech and manners, suppress the natural inclination to pride and vainglory. Above all, the truly humble are satisfied to be humbled, that is, ignored, put to shame, ridiculed, despised. All possible contempt that we could endure in this life is not too great a reparation for one mortal sin, by which the sinner has deserved the everlasting disgrace of hell. No other reparation will be as pleasing and comforting to our thorn-crowned King.

Precious lessons are learned from this mystery of the crowning of Our Blessed Saviour. Let us seek the strength for their practice in loving union with Jesus humbled and despised. Under a Head crowned with thorns, we must not be pampered members.

O Sacred Head surrounded, O Jesus, I adore You,
By crown of piercing thorns, A humble plea I bring,
O bleeding Head, so wounded, My guilt I own before You,
Reviled, and put to scorn. O pardon me, my King.

Jesus Carries the Cross

Pilate had tried repeatedly to release Jesus without offending the Jews. However, all was in vain; his last efforts were answered by their shouts that they had no king but Caesar, and that anyone that made himself king was not a friend of Caesar. Pilate feared he might be reported to the



emperor as favouring rebellious elements among the people, and that would have meant the end of his career. So political expediency decided the case and Jesus was condemned to death.

The official act of condemnation was, according to Roman law, very brief. Sitting upon his official chair, the judge pronounced the sentence upon the accused standing before him in the words "You shall be crucified," and turning to the prisoner's guard he continued, "Soldier, go and get the cross ready." The sentence was carried out immediately. The cross was brought forward and given to the condemned to carry, and the procession to the place of execution began to move. In front of it, on horseback rode the Roman centurion, behind him walked a soldier with a tablet on which was written the crime because of which the condemned suffered the death penalty; then came the condemned carrying the cross, surrounded by four soldiers and followed by a crowd of people, that was swelled by newcomers as the procession moved on through the most frequented streets of the city. Exactly the same procedure was followed in the case of Jesus. The commotion caused by His condemnation and the

crowd accompanying Him must have been extraordinarily great, because He had been known throughout the country; moreover, it was Paschal-tide, with thousands of pilgrims in the city, and it was a triple execution, since two criminals were to suffer the same penalty. Let us now follow Jesus on His sorrowful way of the cross.

It would have been strenuous work for a very robust man to carry a heavy cross over the streets of Jerusalem, roughly paved, uneven, dusty, first descending for a little while and then rising towards the hill of the crucifixion. The distance was about one mile. But Jesus had been extremely weakened by the terrible events of the preceding night and the early morning. He had suffered the agony in the garden, had been cruelly treated by the soldiery during the hours of the night, had gone through the ordeal of trials before the high priests and Pilate, had been scourged and crowned with thorns. He needed rest and care, but instead He now must carry the heavy cross. What excruciating pain every step must have caused by the cross dragging behind Him on the ground, jerking up and down on the cobble stones, striking against the crown of thorns as He staggered on in a daze of utter exhaustion. His soul is tormented by the disgrace of the penalty. People look at Him in amazement; He, the famous Teacher and Miracle Worker, now exposed as an imposter and brought to His deserved punishment; the Pharisees and doctors of the law are conspicuous in the procession with triumphant mien and bearing, and the presence of the two criminals would suggest that Jesus was one like them. Jesus' way of the cross is the way of unspeakable suffering; His body is racked by pain, His soul steeped in agony.

Yet it is not the endurance of pain as such that brought us salvation but the manner in which Jesus suffered. He had entered the world with the words of the psalmist in His mind,

"Behold I come to do Your Will," and this attitude He renewed throughout His life, particularly during His agony in the garden when He prayed, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to You. Remove this chalice from Me; but not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36). It had not been the Father's will to remove this cup of suffering and so He drinks it to its dregs; yet it remains for Him the Father's cup. "The chalice which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11).

Because it was His Father's Will, Jesus suffered without complaining. It would be unworthy of Him, the Son of God and Redeemer of the world, to show signs of unwillingness, discontent and weakness whilst doing the things willed by the Father and performing the greatest act of His life, in fact, the greatest the world has ever witnessed.

However, suffering resignedly does not mean suffering in a spirit of cynicism or insensibility; that would ill accord with the humble Jesus. No, He suffers like a man that feels the pain of the cross in all its bitterness and gratefully accepts any relief or consolation offered Him. In fact, since He suffers as the Head of the human race, He eagerly desires such manifestations of sympathy and acts of charity, knowing that the members of His Mystical Body must have a share in His sufferings, if they are to have a share in the blessings of the Passion. The sacred writers record the kind acts of Simon of Cyrene and the compassion of the holy women; tradition has added the meeting of Jesus with His Holy Mother and the charitable act of Saint Veronica.

There were some pious women in the crowd accompanying Jesus; they were friends of Jesus, convinced of His innocence; all they could do was to give expression to their grief through tears and lamentations. Jesus rewards them by a warning that points to the real cause of His sufferings and

the future punishment of the ungrateful city, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, days shall come wherein they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that have not borne, and the paps that have not given suck.' Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us'. For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:28-31)

Simon the Cyrenean was forced to help Jesus carry the cross, because the soldiers feared Jesus might not be strong enough to reach the top of the hill. It is with reluctance that Simon begins this act of charity, but soon this reluctance changes into the realization that he has received the greatest favour of his life. In all probability, he received the grace of faith in Jesus, resulting in a holy life and zealous work in the young Christian Church. Most likely, also, his sons, Rufus and Alexander, became prominent members of the early Church. And what must have been the joy of Simon on Easter day when he heard of the resurrection of Jesus, and throughout his life, as he saw the Church of Christ spreading among Jews and Gentiles. But the climax of his joy will come when, on the day of judgement, he will behold this cross of Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven in resplendent light as the symbol of Christ's final victory.

The fourth station of the way of the cross records the meeting of Jesus with His Mother. Certain it is that Mary followed the procession, for we find her in the end standing beneath the cross. So it is most probable that somewhere on the way to Calvary she managed to get so near to Jesus as to be able to speak to Him. However, words were not needed; their tearful eyes met and they revealed to each other the sentiments of their hearts, unwavering submission to the will of the Father, love unto death, and that is, for both, the greatest comfort and consolation.

The sixth station of the popular way of the cross recalls the deed of Veronica. Courageously this pious woman pushes through the crowd and the guard of soldiers to offer Jesus a towel to wipe His face. By this act, she publicly proclaimed her love for Jesus as well as her disapproval of the way in which He was treated. Jesus showed His appreciation of this kind deed by leaving on the towel the impression of His sacred face. Thus, Jesus will always reward even the least manifestation of sympathy and love for Him by impressing upon the soul a deeper understanding of His crucified love.

The life of the Christian has been called a way of the cross and rightly so. As another Christ the Christian must follow in the footsteps of His Divine Master; Jesus Himself has expressly demanded it, making the carrying of the cross the indispensable condition for discipleship, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)

The Christian's cross consists in the observance of the commandments. The very fact that most of the commandment are given in the negative form, "You shall not," is evidence that human nature in its present state is inclined to do precisely the thing that is forbidden. The further fact that the threat of punishment is added to the transgression and that the promise of reward is added to their observance, points to the difficulty of their observance. The same holds for the duties of each one's state of life. It is this inherent difficulty which makes the Christian life a way of the cross.

Moreover, God may and commonly does add sufferings not necessarily connected with either the commandments or the duties of one's state of life. These are the manifold tribulations that fall to the lot of men, sickness and disease, the death of loved ones, misfortune and poverty, dissensions

and enmities, unavoidable yet trying associations, earthquakes, floods, wars, persecutions, things of which our times have seen an overabundance. The Christian cannot keep the cross out of his life. Whether or not it will be a blessing for him depends upon the attitude which he takes towards it.

Jesus is our divine teacher and Model in all things and therefore most emphatically in so important a phase of the Christian life as is suffering. The Christian's attitude must be that of Christ. Hence he must learn from Jesus to carry his cross with full submission to the will of our Heavenly Father and thus without complaining. The Father has prepared for His children the cup of suffering; it will be a chalice of salvation if drunk with the sentiments of the child, that trust in the Father as knowing best what is good for us. Let us carry the cross humbly, not presuming on our strength, but seeking strength at the fountains of the Saviour, in His sacred wounds. The greater the tribulations the more insistent must be our prayer, "Passion of Christ, strengthen me." But the most ideal and perfect attitude towards the cross is that of love. The lover of Christ will unite himself with the divine cross-bearer with the intention of bringing Him relief and rendering to Him services comparable to those of Simon and Veronica; he will make the intentions of Jesus his own and offer up his crosses for the same purposes for which Jesus suffered. Meditation on the sufferings of Christ inflamed the saints with love of the cross; it will do the same for us.

This mystery of the Rosary, then, if understood and practised, will stop the flight from the cross and bring the Christian to an ever-increasing sense of duty and loving submission to the will of God in all circumstances. It will convince us that the cross is the only way to atone for our sins and the sins of the world, to implore the grace of

conversion for sinners. The cross is the only way to Christian perfection and heavenly glory. And our sorrowful Mother will rejoice to see her children assume more and more the likeness of her crucified Son.

The Crucifixion

The mystery of the crucifixion comprises the nailing to the cross, the three hours agony, and the death of Jesus. We are reminded of it by every crucifix, which has been called by saints a book of life, in which the faithful can and must read the way of life. Our Blessed Mother stood beneath the cross of her dying Son; she understands this mystery as no other mortal ever did. Uniting ourselves with her, let us look up to Him Whom they have pierced and learn to love Him Who has loved us unto death.



When the sad procession with Jesus carrying the cross had arrived on Calvary, the soldiers at once proceeded to the execution. First, Jesus was offered a cup of wine mixed with some bitter substance. This was usually done by friends of the condemned or other charitable people in order to make the condemned less sensitive to the cruel pains of the crucifixion. But Jesus, having tasted the drink, did not take it; He wished to offer the sacrifice of His life fully conscious without any alleviation. Then Jesus was stripped and ordered to lie down on the cross and now the heavy blows of the hammer drive the nails through his Hands and Feet into the hard wood of the cross. At last, the cross was raised and there Jesus was hanging between heaven and earth in indescribable agony.

Crucifixion was considered in ancient times the most painful manner of inflicting the death penalty and modern medical science concurs in this opinion. The wounds in the hands

and feet must have burned like fire; then the distention of the joints and dislocation of the bones, the disturbance of the blood circulation, the strain upon the heart and lungs, the feverish condition brought about by the lacerations covering the whole body were such as to make the victim cry out in pain and agony. Frequently these sufferings caused the death of the victim within a few hours, but robust natures, especially if the scourging had not preceded, could live for one or two days or even longer.

To these pains, which Jesus suffered in His body, must be added the sufferings of His soul. He felt the injustice of the trials that had brought upon Him the condemnation. He was grieved by the hatred and hypocrisy of the Pharisees. How deeply He must have felt hurt by their cruel mockeries, "Vah, You that would destroy the temple of God and in three days do rebuild it, save Your own-self. If You be the Son of God, save Yourself. He has saved others, Himself He cannot save. If You be the Son of God, come down from the Cross." And where are the crowds that only a week before had enthusiastically acclaimed Him as the Son of David, the King of Israel? Where are they, who on former occasions had admired the great Miracle Worker, the blind who had received their sight, the deaf who had been made to hear, the mute to whom He restored the use of speech, the paralysed who went away from Him in perfect health, where are they now? Where are those whom He had loved above all others and chosen for His intimate following? Peter who had protested that he would go with Jesus even unto death; Thomas who was ready to die with Him, and all the others, where are they? Not one of them except Saint John is present to bear Him company in the most dreadful hours of His life.

Yet the climax of His mental agony was the apparent abandonment by His Heavenly Father. God is the helper in

every need; to Him the fathers cried and He heard them, but He seems deaf to the prayers of His beloved Son, who had sought nothing but the glory of the Father, had always done the things pleasing to Him. There is no abandonment more bitter than to feel abandoned by God; then it is as if the soul's very substance were torn asunder, then the last stars in the firmament fade out, then night settles on the soul, dark and dreary night. Although God did not actually abandon His Son, He did let Him feel the effects of such an abandonment. This abandonment was the greatest suffering of Our Lord, so great that all anguish and sorrow that men ever experienced on earth, even if put together, are like a drop of water compared to the endless ocean; it was that suffering that wrung from the lips of our dear Saviour the heart-rending cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46. See Psalm 21:2 in the Vulgate, which is Psalm 22:1 in the Hebrew.)

Amid such pain and agony death approaches. Death had entered into the world through the disobedience of the first Adam; it is now to be atoned for, by the obedience unto death of the second Adam. With hands and feet nailed to the cross, He can no longer work as He did at Nazareth. He can no longer walk about the land announcing the glad tidings of the Gospel; all He can do is to obey. But His life's mission is consummated, the will of the Father accomplished, and so He commends His soul into the hands of the Father, bows His head and dies. And, behold, the earth trembles, the rock of Calvary is split asunder, the veil of the temple is rent in two, the dead arise from their graves. Nature, horror stricken, mourns over the crime committed. Yet out of this death, new immortal life has sprung; Jesus died that men might live.

What the great Apostle said of Himself applies to every man throughout the world in the past, present, and future. He "loved me and delivered Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20).

The love of Jesus sends forth its flaming light and warmth in the seven words (or sentences) He spoke on the cross. His enemies and executioners and in them all sinners, great and small, are the first beneficiaries of His love, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). This is the language of love that knows how to excuse and to find some mitigating circumstances even in the greatest sin. The Jews could and should have known what they were doing, but having closed their eyes to the light of grace they now do not know what they are doing. Yet their sin shall be forgiven, if they accept Jesus as their Saviour and repent. How they, and all repenting sinners will be received by Jesus, if they trustfully turn to Him for mercy and forgiveness, is illustrated by the words of mercy He spoke to the repentant thief, "Amen I say to you, this day you shall be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)

There is one treasure left in the possession of Jesus, dearer to Him than anything else on earth, His holy Mother. That she may be men's refuge and hope and that through her we may find the way to Jesus, He leaves her to us: "Woman, behold your son." Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your Mother" (John 19:27), If men have refused the invitations of His Love, it may be they will be more responsive to the love of a mother. No matter how much men may have offended Him and how unworthy they may be, He has died for all and He thirsts for their salvation, "I thirst" (John 19:28). His bodily thirst is but the expression of His thirst for souls.

Thus did Jesus love us unto death; thus, He atoned for all the hatred among men that has turned this earth into a valley of tears, into a vast battlefield. Thus He atoned for all selfishness, that thinks only of its own interest and forgets about the sufferings of the rest, for that cynical denial of guilt and responsibility that asks with Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?"; for all love of the world that seeks to

drown its sorrow and pain in the vortex of earthly pleasures. Here Jesus paid the penalty for all fickleness and instability that refuses to finish the task assigned to us by God because it is 'too hard', for that spirit of hatred and revengefulness that cannot bring itself to forgive and to return good for evil. Here Jesus merits the grace of a happy death for all, provided we love Him and through Him commend the souls into the hands of our Heavenly Father.

For Saint Paul the practical lesson drawn from the love of Jesus was, "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Galatians 2:20), and, "To me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). As Jesus loved us unto death, so must we love Him unto death. Nothing can be too hard to endure for Him who has endured for us the unendurable. Love for Him must be love unto the death of our self-love and, if needs be, death unto the shedding of our blood.

Such love unto death is forgiving love that is extended even to our enemies; benevolent love that seeks the best of our fellow-men; generous love ready to give up what is most dear to us; resigned and patient love in the sufferings of body and soul; faithful and persevering love that is influenced neither by the promises and pleasures of the world, nor by its threats and persecutions. Such love burned in the heart of Saint Paul when he wrote, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution or hunger or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? For, I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39).

Love unto death is the lesson which our Lady of Fatima wants us to learn from this mystery. Shall we be able to

resist the appeal of love? "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself" (John 12:32). Let us allow ourselves to be drawn to Him by the bonds of love in and through the Immaculate Heart of our Blessed Mother standing beneath the cross.

The Message of the Glorious Mysteries



Introduction

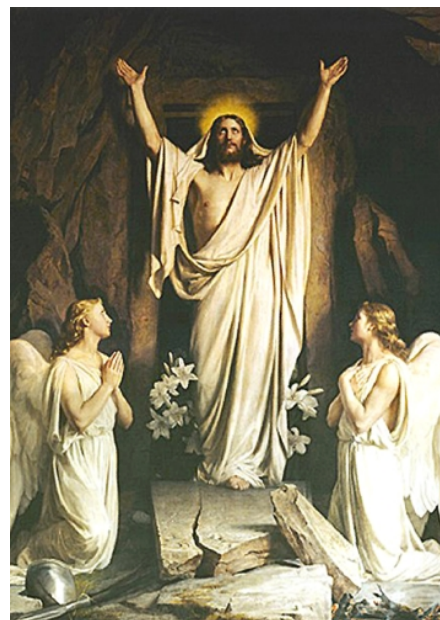
The Glorious Mysteries give us a preview, so to say, and a foretaste of the glory that awaits us in the life to come, which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and the human heart has not experienced. For this reason, they most powerfully stimulate Christian fervour and perseverance. Now, and not only in heaven, must we rise in a spiritual sense with Christ from the death of sin and walk in newness of life; now our thoughts and desires must dwell in heaven and delight in the company of angels and saints; now we must prepare our body for its glorified life by giving unstintingly of our physical strength to the service of God. In the light of these mysteries, we recognize the important role which bodily pain and hardship plays in the Christian way of the cross and we learn to mortify the body with all its evil inclinations now so that it may live eternally. Not only in heaven but now, must Mary be our Queen in whose service we glory and the imitation of whose virtues we make the ambition of our lives. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, these mysteries convey invincible courage, patience, peace and joy. The Holy Spirit has made us His temples and dwells in us now, so that full of the Holy Spirit we shall rise in glory on the day of resurrection.

The Resurrection

"If in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are," according to Saint Paul "of all men most miserable. But now Christ has risen from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:19-20). The

Resurrection is a postulate of God's justice and love. Jesus glorified the Father in His life and Passion, now the Father glorifies Him; Jesus humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death upon a cross, and therefore the Father has exalted Him and has given Him the name which is above all

names, so that in the name of Jesus, the knees of all must bend, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. The same principle holds, with due proportion, also for us. If we suffer with Christ, we shall be glorified with Him, and if we die with Christ, we shall rise with Him. The mystery of the Resurrection ushers in our Saviour's glorified life; it is a life of inspiration, power, strength and victory.



Jesus has died on the cross and the soldier has pierced His side with a lance, so that there can be no doubt as to His real death. To forestall any attempt on the part of the disciples to steal the body of Jesus, the tomb is sealed and a guard of soldiers is placed in front of it. These soldiers keep watch in front of the tomb the whole Sabbath and the following night. No disciples have come into sight; all has been quiet and peaceful. But as the morning of the first day of the week begins to dawn, the scene suddenly changes. An earthquake shakes the city, an angel, resplendent with heavenly light, rolls back the stone from the tomb; it is an

empty tomb - Jesus is there no longer. The guards are hurled to the ground terror-stricken; as soon as they recover, they hasten to the city as fast as they can to bring the news to the authorities at Jerusalem. The report comes to those men like lightning and thunder from a clear sky; consternation is written in their faces. There can be no denial of the fact reported by the guards, and so they have recourse to an expedient to extricate themselves from this embarrassing situation and to prevent a popular change of attitude in favour of Jesus. They bribe the guards, charging them to spread the news that whilst they were asleep, the disciples had come and stolen the body. Poor, deluded Pharisees, who childishly think they can stop the triumphant march of the risen Christ by so silly a lie.

Let us now look at the figure of our risen Saviour. He is all light and splendour; He moves about with speed of light, neither walls nor door nor locks can stop Him. The wounds and disfigurement of His body have given way to immortal beauty and vigour; but in His hands and feet and in His sacred side He keeps the marks of the nails and the lance. They will forever be the sparkling gems blazing forth the truth that, as we were saved through the cross, so through the cross we must attain to light and glory.

Jesus who had loved His own who were in the world even unto death, does not forget them in His glory; He hastens to bring to them the joyful news of His Resurrection. Though not mentioned by the sacred writers, it must be taken for granted that Jesus appeared first of all to His holy Mother; we could not imagine anything else. (Saint Ambrose knew of it and preached it.) What a meeting this must have been of Mother and Son on that Easter morning. Rejoice, O Mother of Christ, be glad, O Queen of heaven, for your Son is risen from the dead. As in His mortal life, so in His glory He remains her Son and she His Mother. Then followed the

many apparitions of Jesus to His apostles and friends, confirming their faith and speaking to them of the Kingdom of God.

The Resurrection of Christ, and the glorified life following it, is Christ's decisive victory. He had foretold it and referred to it as proof of His divine Sonship and authority, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19) By rising from the dead Christ has proved that He is God, His teaching true, His promises certain of fulfillment. And so His cause shall be victorious in the Church as a whole as well as in the individual soul, though in either case the way to victory leads over Calvary.

Christ's victory is above all victory over sin, and in this victory, we must share in this life already, if we wish the glory of the Resurrection to be ours in the life to come. Baptism is the beginning of this victory, "Know you not that all we, who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized into His death? For we are buried together with Him by baptism into death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4). In order to guarantee ultimate victory, in spite of possible falls due to human weakness, Christ has left to His Church as His most precious Easter gift the Sacrament of Penance, which He instituted on the evening of Easter Sunday, "Receive the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." (John 20:23)

The ideal of the Christian is the new life in Christ, free from sin. For that reason also holy Mother Church insists upon confession of all mortal sins at least once a year, and upon the reception of Holy Communion during the Easter season; thus the life of grace is restored if it should have been lost, and if it has not been lost it is strengthened and more

intimately conformed to the life of Christ through the power of the bread of life. This new life, according to the intensity of its fervour, shows forth even whilst on earth the immortal vigour of Christ's glorified life. It is a life of spiritual beauty, resplendent with the light of virtue. There is promptness and determination in obeying the call of duty and the inspirations of grace, courage and confidence in the profession of the faith, a holy pride in following Christ our victorious Leader, a joyful readiness to go with Him even unto death. Hardships and privations, fear of men, threats of persecution cannot alter its course. Deep and living faith in the Resurrection is incompatible with timidity and half-heartedness in our allegiance to Christ the King, and will never compromise at the expense of truth and loyalty. "Knowing this that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer. Knowing that Christ rising again from the dead, dies now no more, death can no more have dominion over Him. So do you also reckon, that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus Our Lord" (Romans 6:6-11).

Our blessed Mother requests that we meditate on this mystery. She knows the conditions of the times and the growing danger to souls, the growing intensity of the Christian warfare as we approach the consummation of all things. Therefore, she wants us to be fortified with the invincible spirit of the Resurrection. The mystery of iniquity is at work, it can be overcome only by the mystery of a new, a holy life with Christ, the Victor over sin and death abiding in us, and we in Him. In His Resurrection, Jesus speaks to us as He spoke to the apostles, "Have confidence, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

The Ascension

As Son of God Jesus possessed the beatific vision from the very first moment His soul was created, and, in consequences the glorified state of the body with heaven as His dwelling place were due to Him. However, the saving mission which He had taken upon Himself called for suffering which was incompatible with the glorified state; so Jesus hid His glory and took the form of a servant, to labour and to suffer until His mission was accomplished. When He arose from the dead He assumed the glorified state of His body, but for our instruction and encouragement, He remained on earth for another forty days. When these days had come to an end, He gloriously ascended into heaven.



Saint Luke paints a lovely picture of Our Lord on His way to Mount Olivet on Ascension Day. The same road which had taken Him to this place only a few weeks before, there to begin His passion with His bloody agony, now sees Him return to the scene of battle as glorious conqueror. As on that evening so He is now surrounded by His apostles, but their number is swelled by many other friends and followers of Jesus. Jesus gives them His last instructions and answers their questions until they arrive at the place chosen by Him. The great moment of His departure from them has come. He speaks to them His final word of parting; it is the apostolic commission, "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Going therefore teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20). With a last blessing for the ungrateful world for which He had died, with a Father's blessing for all His faithful friends, with a last loving and grateful look to His holy Mother He begins to raise Himself into space, higher and higher, until a cloud hides Him from the sight of human eyes. And whilst His friends are still looking towards heaven two angels appeared, assuring them that this Jesus, whom they had seen ascending into heaven, would come again such as they had seen Him on this day.

With holy joy in their hearts the apostles and friends of Jesus returned to Jerusalem; even though they would miss the presence of their beloved Master, they rejoiced over His glory. Their thoughts henceforth dwelt in heaven; there they found the inspiration to a holy life, strength and consolation and joy in the midst of their labours and even in the tortures of a bloody death. And how often during the course of centuries, especially in periods of persecution and distress, did the followers of Christ look to heaven, there to discover a sign of His coming; but even though He delayed, their faith remained unshaken. Their thoughts were with Him in heaven and the certainty that one day they would share in His triumph and glory, gave them new courage to persevere to the end.

Jesus entered heaven, but not alone. A wonderful scene was enacted when Jesus had vanished from the sight of His friends on earth. Limbo gives up the souls it has held for thousands of years and they join Jesus in His triumphant entry into heaven. At last, their prayers and hopes have been fulfilled. When Jesus had died on the cross, His soul descended into Limbo and brought these holy souls the joyous news that soon the days of their waiting would come

to an end. Now the great moment has come; they join Jesus in a glorious procession of light and splendour. As they approach the gates of heaven, their joyous cries announce the coming of heaven's King to the blessed spirits of the heavenly Kingdom. "Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates, and the King of glory shall enter in." From within the heavenly gates comes the question, "Who is this King of glory?" And the answer goes thundering back from the multitudes of Limbo, "The Lord, who is strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates, and the King of glory shall enter in" (Psalm 23:7-10 in the Vulgate, or Psalm 24:7-10 in the Hebrew). And now the gates of heaven are thrown open, the choirs of angels pay homage to the glorious King, and welcome into heaven their new brethren, the first human souls, to be their companions forever. Then mid them, Jesus enters the eternal Holy of Holies and takes possession of His royal throne, and of His kingdom, there shall be no end.

The Apostle's Creed describes the heavenly life of Jesus as sitting at the right hand of the Father. This signifies His eternal rest, the absence of warfare and suffering, the possession of undisturbed joy and peace. True, He also remains the Head of His Mystical Body, the Church, and the Church continues to labour and to struggle, to carry on the warfare, for souls to the end, but the malice of men does not reach Jesus any more, enthroned as He is in heavenly glory. Yet Jesus' life in heaven is not only rest. In His farewell address Jesus assured the apostles that in His Father's house there were many mansions and that He went to prepare a place for them; having done this He would come and take them to Himself, in order that where He was they, too, would be. So Jesus in His glory prepares those mansions, and as His faithful servants arrive in the course of centuries, they find their place prepared according to their works. Saint Paul

reveals another feature of our Saviour's heavenly life when he tells us that Jesus is always making intercession for us. He remains our Mediator at the throne of His Father, praying as the Head of His Mystical Body, the Church. His Mediator's work culminates in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. As Priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech, He offers Himself through the instrumentality of human priests as the clean oblation, and feeds the faithful with His own flesh and blood, the bread of life. Remaining in heaven and without detriment to His glorified state He has in a most intimate manner united Himself with all the members of His Mystical Body even whilst on earth, and made true His promise that He would remain with us to the end of the world. In the Blessed Eucharist, the heavenly life of Jesus and the earthly life of the faithful meet in the most wonderful manner. We have heaven in our very midst.

Here on earth, "We have not here a lasting city but we seek one that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14); we are strangers and pilgrims on the way to our eternal home. "Therefore, if you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:1-2). Heaven is our goal, and if we wish to reach it, we certainly must keep it in mind, never to lose sight of it.

Heaven-mindedness is characteristic of the true Christian and lover of Christ. Alas, it has grown cold in many Christian hearts; the thought of heaven hardly ever enters their mind, it does not influence their lives, they show the same love of the world, the same concern about its possessions and pleasures, the same flight from the cross as those that do not know Christ. It is indeed a timely and practical petition that Holy Church puts on our lips on the feast of the Ascension: that with our minds we may always dwell in heaven.

Looking down from those heavenly heights gives us the correct perspective of things of this earth. How small and insignificant they all appear and yet also how great and precious, since it is by them that we merit the everlasting, all-exceeding glory of heaven. The thought of heaven makes us fervent, zealous, patient, generous; it detaches us from what may be as dear to us as life itself. Saint Ignatius filled with the thought of heaven could say, "How I loathe this earth, when I look up to heaven." Heaven is worth every sacrifice, and therefore Our Lord exhorts us to lay up for ourselves treasures there, where moth and rust do not consume them and where thieves cannot steal and carry them away. The loss of heaven is the greatest loss, because it is the loss of our soul, the loss of God Himself; therefore no earthly possession or pleasure can make up for it, "For what does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26). The thought of heaven inspires a strong and fearless love of the cross, "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation works for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinth 4:17). The Christian imbued with the thought of heaven knows no real sadness; he radiates spiritual warmth, heavenly joy, which cannot but influence his fellowmen for the better.

The thought of heaven is a most effective remedy against earthly-mindedness, the strongest bulwark against the materialism of the world, an ever present incentive to a fervent Christian life; it will, in a very particular manner, lead us to the altar of the Eucharistic Sacrifice and perpetual presence. We shall come, more and more, to love the beauty of His house and the place where His glory dwells. And so through this mystery of the rosary our blessed Mother leads us to her Divine Son, now in the Eucharist and, in due time, in His eternal heavenly glory.

The Descent of the Holy Ghost

Christ's earthly mission came to an end with His Ascension. The Holy Spirit was to bring His work to final completion. For that reason, Jesus sent Him to the Church, and to prepare for His coming He commanded the apostles to stay in Jerusalem until they would be endowed with power from on high. So the apostles and friends of Jesus, having seen Him rising into heaven, returned to Jerusalem and "with one mind continued steadfastly in prayer with the women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and with His brethren." (Acts 1:14)



Pentecost of the Old Testament, the fiftieth day after the Jewish Easter or Passover, commemorated the giving of the law on Mount Sinai; Pentecost of the New Testament, the fiftieth day after the Christian Easter, commemorates the establishment of the new Covenant of love. Nine days had elapsed since the Ascension and the day of Pentecost had arrived. The apostle and friends of Jesus were assembled for their customary prayer in the Upper Room, when all of a sudden a violent wind began to blow, arousing the attention of neighbours and passers-by. Within the house, another startling event took place. Tongues of fire appeared and settled on each one present, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with diverse tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak." Then there rose up to God a mighty prayer of praise and thanks in many languages for all His wondrous deeds. In the crowd that gathered around the house, there were Jews, "devout

men from every nation under heaven," who had come to Jerusalem for the celebration of the feast of Pentecost. They were greatly surprised to hear the apostles speak in the languages of their own countries; their amazement grew when they found out that these men were Galileans, whose native tongue was Aramaic. And, "They were all amazed and marvelled saying, 'Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans? And how have we heard every man our own language wherein we were born?' They were all astonished, and wondered." (Acts 2:2-11 and 12)

So impressed were the crowds by this miracle that on that very day three thousand persons came to believe in Christ and received baptism. The fact that the apostles praised God in many foreign tongues and that representatives of many nations joined the Church on her first Pentecost marked her as the Church of all races and peoples. From now on, the Church will grow and spread; even to the ends of the earth; the apostles and their successors will preach the Gospel and be witnesses to Christ their Divine Master.

Wind, though not seen itself, is seen and felt in its effects. It possesses tremendous power; it can sweep before it all obstacles, clear the atmosphere of poisonous germs. So the unseen power of the Holy Spirit overthrows the strongholds of ancient and modern paganism and clears the atmosphere of the poisonous germs of godless philosophies. Having thus prepared the ground the Holy Spirit begins the positive work of enlightening the minds of men with His truth and warming their hearts with His love. This, His work is symbolized by the tongues of fire. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. To the hell-inspired philosophies of the present day, to the insincerity and pride of dictators and tyrants He opposes the truth of man's nothingness and God's sovereign majesty. God is the creator and man the creature, God is infinitely perfect and man is limited in every

way; man comes and goes and his work falls into dust, but the word of God remains forever. As Our Lord said, the Holy Spirit convinces the world of sin and justice and judgement.

But the Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of love, and love must accompany truth, if the world is to be gained for Christ. Without love selfishness reigns supreme. This explains why mutual distrust divides individuals and nations, why hatred has reached a degree of intensity and a depth of degradation and savagery that only Satan can have inspired. Satan hates God and whatever is loved by God, and if he cannot destroy, he will at least cause as much suffering and harm as possible. The love of the Holy Spirit unites. The love of God has made men His children, members of the same family. "Our Father, Who art in heaven," is the prayer taught us by our Divine Saviour. Where the love of the Holy Spirit has been poured into the hearts of men, there they are drawn into the living and loving union with Jesus as the members of His Mystical Body, there they are one with Him as the branches are one with the vine. One body, one spirit, one bread, one hope for all. It is the love of the Holy Spirit that has called into existence the wonderful works of charity that are the glory of the Catholic Church.

In doing this work, the Holy Spirit employs the Church as His organ. Though adapting herself to the conditions of the times and the character of the peoples to whom she ministers, the means employed by the Church throughout the centuries are essentially the same as those used by her on the first Pentecost. She gains her converts by preaching, not in the words of human wisdom but in the power of the Spirit, not by deception or violence but by the persuasion of truth and love, symbolized by the tongues of fire. But realizing her dependence upon the Holy Spirit, Holy Church

unceasingly prays, "Send forth, O Lord, Your Spirit, and they shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth."

In the work of spreading the faith, Mary the Mother of Jesus and the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, holds a most distinguished place. The Holy Spirit overshadowed her with His power at Nazareth to make her the Mother of Jesus, and through her to give the world its Saviour. She is to accomplish her mission not by the labours of the apostolic ministry but by her intercession and example. She is the suppliant omnipotence, strong and mighty as an army in battle array. Holy Church says of her that she has brought joy to the whole world, and that through her all heresies have been overcome. She implores for the preachers of the word of God a more profound understanding of what they preach as well as the method of presentation that convinces and gains the good will of men. Through her Immaculate Heart flow the streams of love that issue from the depths of the Godhead into the souls of men so that, detached from the fleeting things of the earth, they may fix their hearts upon the things of heaven. This precisely is the need of our time, when millions of men, overwhelmed by the flood of secularism have lost all appreciation of spiritual values, think of nothing, strive for nothing but the good things of this world. Great, therefore, must be the desire of our heavenly Mother that men would turn to the Holy Spirit, accept His truth, be inflamed with His love and become her loving children.

We, too, have received the power from on high to be witnesses unto Christ, though not under the visible symbol of fiery tongues. The Sacrament of Confirmation, in particular, is the Sacrament through which the faithful receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit's grace for confessing and spreading the faith. Not all the faithful are called to preach the word of God officially, but all can and must do it

through words that enlighten and deeds that arouse love. The holy lives of the faithful are tongues of fire demonstrating the power of love and truth. A halfhearted practice of religion, a life infected with the spirit of the world will impede the renewal of the world in Christ.

This Pentecostal mystery then calls for more truth and love in our lives, more interest in the cause of Christ and the Church, more courage and unshakable confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our Lady of Fatima expects this of us. Though she was not sent to preach like the apostles, we cannot imagine that in dealings with her fellowmen she spoke of anything or did anything that did not have for its ultimate object to bring others to a knowledge of her Divine Son and to the ways of salvation opened in the Church. We must heed her requests, follow her example, if the world is not to perish but to be saved, if the Kingdom of Christ is to replace the kingdom of Satan. Do we realize our responsibility and use the opportunities at our disposal for bringing about such happy results?

The Assumption

The last information the sacred writers give us regarding our blessed Mother is that she was united with the apostles and friends of Jesus, in prayer preparing for the coming of the Holy Spirit. After this, no more mention is made of her. Whether Mary, after the Ascension, stayed in Jerusalem or left it, whether she died soon or lived for many more years we do not know. One thing only is certain and that is that the rest of her life was devoted to prayer and to work in the interests of her Divine Son. We may also assume that, though she was fully resigned to the Will of God as to the duration of her earthly life, she longed for death. If Saint Paul could say that he desired to be dissolved and to be with Christ because of His ardent love of the Master, how much more Mary, who loved her Divine Son with an immeasurably greater love. Desire consumed her strength. As Jesus had died in atonement for the sins of the world, so Mary, wishing in all things to be like Jesus, also desired to die and to offer her life as a holocaust of love for the same purpose. At last, the day arrived when Jesus came to take His Mother home, "Arise, make haste, My love, My dove, My beautiful one and come. . . . Come, you shall be crowned." (Canticle 2:10; and 4:8)



It has been the faith of the Church from the beginning that the body of the Mother of God was soon after death again united with the soul and taken up into heaven. In memory of this event, the Assumption was celebrated probably as early as the Fifth Century, and on November 1, 1950, was

solemnly proclaimed an article of faith. The Assumption is in complete harmony with the place Mary holds in the economy of salvation. She has been conceived without sin, was never touched by concupiscence, never entertained an inordinate thought or desire, the eternal Word of God has taken His flesh and blood from her, and for nine months she was a living tabernacle of the Most High; our Christian feeling shrinks from the very thought that her body should have become a prey to corruption. It is also a fact that never were any relics of our Blessed Mother's body exposed for veneration, as is the case with relics of other saints. The Assumption of Mary is a confirmation of our faith in the resurrection and glorification of bodies, a new link between us and heaven, a new bond of love and hope that unites us, her children in this valley of tears, to her who is our Mother, our sweetness, our life, and our hope.

The body plays an important part in working out our salvation. No good work can be performed, not even a thought can be in our minds without some co-operation of bodily organs. It is the body that tires under the strain of prayer and work, feels the hardships and privations of the Christian warfare, is mortified by works of penance. The body, too, therefore must have a share in the reward enjoyed by the soul from the moment it enters heaven. Our Lord tells us, "The hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs, shall hear the Voice of the Son of God. And they who have done good shall come forth unto resurrection of life; but they who have done evil, unto resurrection of judgement" (John 5:28-29). And Saint Paul assures us, "Behold I tell you a mystery. for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall rise again incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal body must put on immortality. But this mortal has put on immortality, then shall come to pass the word that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in

victory. O death, where is your victory, O death, where is thy sting?' Now the sting of death is sin." (1 Corinthians 15:51-55 and 56)

The thought of the resurrection and glorification of bodies inspired the martyrs in their tortures and death; it is a source of strength in temptation, of consolation in tribulations. We shall rise with a body immortal, spiritual, resplendent, with glory, under the complete control of the spirit. Indeed, this body of ours, though falling into dust, is not destined for the corruption of the grave forever, but through death and corruption, it will pass to immortal and glorious life.

The mystery sheds wonderful light on the place the body should hold in the Christian life. The Christian, looking forward to this glorious transfiguration of his body, will zealously guard it as the temple of God's glory; he will not abuse it, degrade it, desecrate it by sin. Even now, the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and it is because of this Holy Spirit dwelling in Him that God will raise it up on the last day. Since the body with its natural inclinations can become a great hindrance and danger to salvation, the Christian will mortify it; he will not pamper it, but rather make it an instrument for his own sanctification and merit. The daily labours and hardships imposed upon us by our vocational duties mortify the body, the patient endurance of the manifold sufferings sent by God subject it to the rule of the Spirit, and works of penance, demanded by the Church or freely chosen, will further curb the rebellion of the flesh. Thus, the body more and more becomes a willing instrument of the spirit in the service of God, and to the same extent merits its own glorification. The saints did not spare the body; their works of penance may at times make us shudder, but they knew what they were doing. They agreed with Saint Paul and acted in the spirit of his words, "I reckon that the

sufferings of the present time are not worth to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18)

Such a view of the body will mightily contribute to make the Christian life more spiritual, more supernatural, abounding in zeal and merit, in patience, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit. And would such a condition among the faithful not have a beneficial influence upon their fellowmen? Would it not be a joy for our heavenly Mother? Indeed, we have good reason to rejoice and to give thanks for the light and inspiration offered us in this mystery, "Let us rejoice in the Lord and celebrate a festive day in honour of the Blessed Mother of God, over whose Assumption the angels rejoice and praise the Son of God, her Son."

Crowned as Heaven's Queen

There is nothing in tradition or legend to give us definite information about this mystery, yet the rosary is recited throughout the world and approved by Holy Church. This fact alone is sufficient proof for the substantial truth of the contents of this mystery. The dignity of Mary, as the Mother of God and our Saviour, and the all-surpassing holiness of her life, give her incomparable pre-eminence in majesty and glory over all the angels and saints. It is altogether in harmony with our holy faith to suppose that her entrance into heaven should have been the cause of a special joy and should have been celebrated according to our human way of putting it, by a festive ceremony at which she was crowned as Queen of Heaven. Let us picture this feast to ourselves; the invocations of Mary as Queen, in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, give us so to say, the numbers of the festive programme. The feast, however, is timeless and will continue until all the children of Mary have been gathered around their heavenly Mother and Queen.



The good angels never sinned but remained loyal to God when Lucifer rose in rebellion. Though not their Saviour, Jesus is nevertheless also their Mediator in virtue of His soul, by which He stands between God and all created spiritual natures. Mary is the Mother of their Mediator. Like the angels she was never stained by sin, her will never troubled by any stirring of concupiscence. Her mind is more penetrating than that of the Cherubim, her heart burns with warmer love than the Seraphim ; she rules over vaster domains than the

angelic Thrones; the grandeur of the mystery, which God wrought in her makes the Powers thrill with wonder, the Archangels standing before the throne of God now also stand before her throne, as she has taken her place next to her Divine Son; the Angels humbly admit that all their services to men are outdone immeasurably by the share the Blessed Mother had in the work of redemption. And so all the angels bow before her and offer her the diadem of the Queen of angels.

Those holy men, that lived at the dawn of human history and are mentioned among the ancestors of Christ, saw the Saviour of the world from afar, as they hoped and longed and prayed for His coming. Mary has given Him birth and calls Him her Son. And the patriarchs greet her as their greatest daughter and Queen.

These seers of old saw and foretold the mysteries of man's redemption. Their prophecies found their fulfilment through Mary. As the splendour of the noonday sun outshines the early dawn, so the dazzling splendour of the Virgin Mother of the Saviour shines above the twilight of the prophet's visions and humbly do the prophets pay homage to Mary as their Queen.

The Apostles, they were the chosen companions of Jesus; they remained loyal to their Master and were entrusted by Him with the continuation of His mission. The sound of their voices went out into the world. Mary was the Mother of Him whose Gospel they preached. She crushed the head of the serpent and through her prayers and merits the Kingdom of Christ has been extended, fortified, and protected more effectively than by all the apostles and their successors in the apostolic ministry. So the apostles approach and present her with the crown and sceptre of the apostolic college.

That which makes the martyr is not the mere fact that he died for Christ, but that he loves Christ unto the shedding of his blood. There are also martyrs of charity, and their martyrdom may be more excellent as it lasts longer and calls for greater endurance. Hidden labours and sufferings of the soul may consume life's energy like a holocaust. Mary did not die a bloody death, but she endured sorrows of the soul greater than all the tortures endured by the martyrs of blood. Holy Church endeavours to give us some idea of the greatness of her sorrow, when she stood beneath the cross of her dying Son, by applying to her the words of the prophet, "O all you that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow. To what shall I compare you? Or to what shall I liken you, O daughter of Jerusalem; To what shall I equal you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion (Sion). For great as the sea, is your sorrow" (Lamentations 1:12, and 2:13). And all the holy martyrs resplendent with the fiery red of charity or the bloody red of martyrdom wave their palms in exultation, acclaiming Mary as their Queen.

These saints have faithfully followed in the footsteps of Jesus, some in lowliness and hidden from the world, others as the teachers, leaders, the firebrands of their generation. But there is hardly one among them that did not pay the tribute of human weakness in regrettable faults and failings; what distinguished them and made them saints was their determined, persistent, and successful effort in striving after perfection. According to their character and the conditions of the times in which they were living, they excelled in the one or the other virtue. Mary alone was without fault or failing, excelling not only in one or the other virtue, but possessing all in the highest degree, since she was always full of grace. All the holy confessors are filled with delight to behold in Mary the ideal of the virtue, after which they have

striven; there is among them all not one equal to her; she is their Queen.

The very designation of the Mother of God as the Blessed Virgin, the Virgin Mother, points to her towering position among all the virgins of the Church. She is the blessed one among them, as she is the blessed among all women. Not simply the fact of her virginity gives her this pre-eminence but the intensity of the love with which she consecrated herself to God. Mary's love and devotion to God cannot be measured by human standards. She is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, all spiritual, all holy in body and in soul, and so the choirs of holy virgins lift up their lilies in rapturous acclaim to greet and honour their Virgin Queen.

Not only the angels and all those saints that distinguished themselves by their heroic virtue and are venerated by the Church as saints, glory in having the Blessed Virgin as their Queen, but likewise all the other blessed inhabitants of heaven. They are lesser stars, humble, little souls, who though not achieving heroic sanctity, served God with an upright and loving heart; among them are also the penitent sinners, eternally grateful for having been saved from eternal ruin. Whatever their condition may be, there is not one among them that does not owe a debt of gratitude for his salvation to Mary, the Mother of the Saviour, Mediatrix of all Graces, Mother of Mercy, Refuge of Sinners, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. And if they form if we may say so, the outer fringe of the heavenly Kingdom, they raise their voices the more humbly and gratefully from their distant places to greet her as their loving and merciful Queen.

Mary is Queen not only of the saints in heaven, but also of all the children of God on earth. By giving her the love and loyalty of our hearts and following her leadership we, too,

shall reach our heavenly goal. The foregoing considerations point out the way, in which this can be done.

Sinlessness is the first and foremost requisite for the subjects of our heavenly Queen. Ours is not angelic purity, but it can be baptismal innocence, and if that has been lost, it still can be the purity of penitents.

Like the patriarchs and prophets of old, we can pray and long for the coming of the kingdom of God. "Thy Kingdom come," we were taught to pray by our blessed Saviour. Let us pray for the coming of God's Kingdom into the hearts of men through grace, for the spread of the Church, the kingdom of Christ throughout the world, for the second coming of our Saviour with power and majesty so "That transgression may be finished and sin may have an end and iniquity may be abolished and everlasting justice may be brought and vision and prophecy may be fulfilled" (Daniel 9:24). This is the grand object for which our heavenly Queen prayed, worked and suffered, for which she now intercedes and for which she desires our co-operation.

The apostles, and in them also their successors, were chosen by Jesus to carry the message of the Gospel to the nations. The harvest is great and many labourers are needed; therefore, we are to pray to the Lord of the harvest that He may send labourers into His vineyard. Loyal to the Queen of the apostles we shall endeavour to foster missionary vocations and to support the education and the work of missionaries. Even should we not become martyrs of blood, the spirit of martyrs can be ours. If we cannot lay down our lives in one great act of martyrdom, let it be done through the many acts of devotion, love, and self-denial that make up the fervent Christian life. Then, as Saint Chrysostom says, God will accept the good will and grant also to such as actually do not become martyrs the reward of martyrs.

Whatever may be the state of our lives we can and must be confessors of the faith by its faithful practice. But our ambition should aim high; continuous progress in virtue and Christian perfection must be our goal, as it was the goal of the confessors.

Not all are called to a life of virginity, but the spirit of virginity can be ours, and that is the spirit of loving and undivided consecration to God and generosity in giving all that God expects of us. God is not satisfied with a divided heart.

If we feel that we are still far from the holiness of the saints this should not be reason for discouragement. The saints did not become saints overnight, but by dint of much prayer, work and self-denial, rising again and again from their falls through humble repentance. All this we also can do, no matter what may have been the sins of the past. The mercy of Jesus is infinite, and Mary is the refuge of sinners and our most merciful Queen. So we look up to our Queen and resolve to listen to the daily message of the rosary. In the 'Epistle' for the feast of the Most Holy Rosary she pleads with motherly solicitude "Now, therefore, ye children, hear me; blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that hears me, and that watches daily at my gates; and waits at the posts of my doors. He that shall find me, shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord." (Proverbs 8:32-35)

With filial, trustful love we dedicate ourselves to her in a final act of consecration, "O my Queen, O my Mother, I give myself entirely to you, keep me, guard me as your property and possession."

About This EBook

The text of this book is taken from a series of articles and booklets on *The Message of the Rosary* by Father Aloysius Biskupek, S.V.D.

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